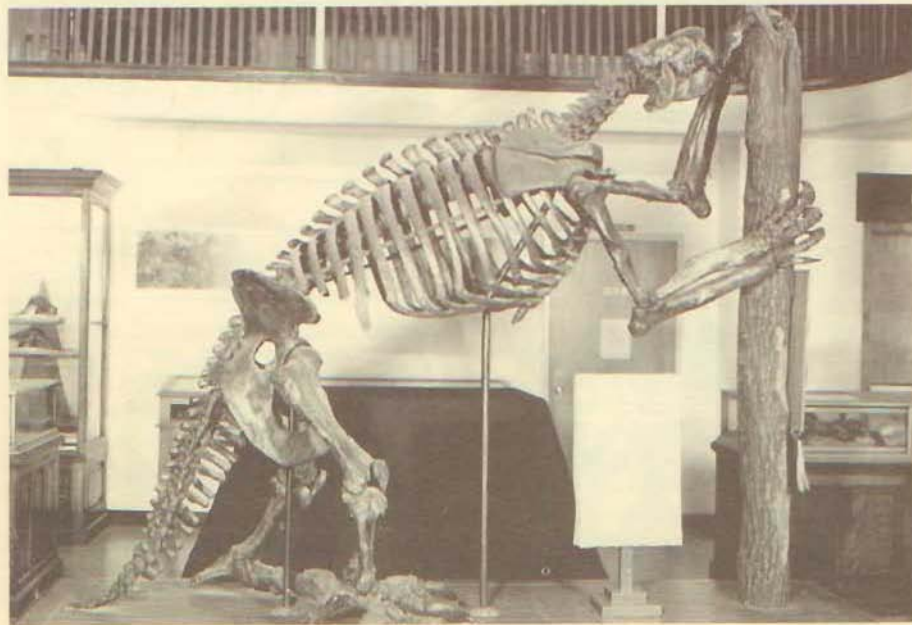


Millersburg Ground Sloth



Bones from a ground sloth found at Millersburg in 1890 were assembled and displayed at Ohio State University's Orton Hall.

A chance shovel stroke brought relief to the chilly tedium of ditch digging in December 1890, as one of the workmen on Abraham Drushell's farm near Millersburg (Holmes County) uncovered the remains of a giant ground sloth. One of the most complete specimens of *Megalonyx jeffersoni* ever found in the state — less than a half dozen specimens being known from Ohio — this discovery on the Drushell farm caused considerable excitement, both locally and nationally.

The bones lay at the bottom of the six-foot-deep drainage ditch, lying on a bed of marl and buried in peat. The initial find included a vertebra with rib attached and part of a leg. During the weekend before Christmas, Drushell had his men search for further remains of the "monster animal," as the newspapers dubbed it, and was rewarded with the discovery of the hind legs, several more vertebrae, and a variety of

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For the duration of Orton Hall's current renovation, the bones from the Holmes County ground sloth will be displayed at the Ohio Historical Society.

Identification of the rare find was confirmed the Saturday after Christmas, when Professor Edward Orton, State Geologist, visited Millersburg and the scene of the discovery, conducted there by Attorney Hanna. Orton, perhaps overly excited, stated that "the find is the most important in the history of the State, and as to the fine preservation of the bones he has never seen anything to equal them." The editor added that "as to the name of the animal he says the one suggested by the FARMER (*Megalonyx*) is probably the correct one." Coincidentally, Dr. Orton was preparing to attend the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America in

Washington, D.C., the following week, and he borrowed one of the hind legs of the *Megalonyx* skeleton to exhibit at the meeting, thus giving it nationwide attention.

Subsequently, another geology professor, E. W. Clappole of Buchtel College (now the University of Akron) visited the *Megalonyx* site with Hanna and published the most extensive report available on the discovery. Drushell donated the remains to The Ohio State University, and Ward's Natural Science Establishment of Rochester, New York, mounted the specimen, reproducing missing parts with plaster. At some point, the entire skeleton was painted black, making it difficult to distinguish the genuine from the reconstructed bones.

The Holmes County *Megalonyx* became a fixture at Orton Hall, the geological museum on the Ohio State campus, where it remained on exhibit for nearly ninety years. Recently, with the current renovation and restoration of Orton Hall, the *Megalonyx* skeleton was loaned to the Ohio Historical Society, where it will be displayed for the next two years. Taking advantage of having

the skeleton available, Natural History Department staff members Donn Davids and Dave Dyer have cleaned and repaired the ground sloth, re-staining and shellacking the bones. Four weeks of work have resulted in a more natural looking display, with the old tree trunk and display base removed.

Originally described by Thomas Jefferson in 1797, on the basis of bones found in a Virginia cavern, the type species of *Megalonyx* (literally "Big Claw") was later named for Jefferson. It is the only species found in Ohio, where its remains are by no means common, having been found only in Holmes, Huron, Fairfield, and Darke counties. The large herbivore must have ranged across the state, at least during the summer months, and this particular individual apparently drowned along the margin of a post-glacial lake or pond. Standing all of seven feet, three inches high, its skeleton serves as a spectacular example of one of the most curious members of Ohio's extinct Pleistocene "megafauna."

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